United Nations S/PV.6501

Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6501st meeting

Tuesday, 22 March 2011, 10.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Li Baodong	(China)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Čolaković
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure I invite Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: Since last month's briefing (see S/PV.6488), there has been an increase in violent incidents and tensions on the ground, while efforts to restart the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have not produced visible results. We must not let the recent surge in violence further undermine the possibility of finding a way towards an agreement on final status issues or undermine the State-building achievements thus far. The wider region has continued to witness dramatic developments, which add to the importance of redoubling efforts to break the deadlock as progress towards peace and meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to statehood could be an important stabilizing force in the Middle East.

During the reporting period, the Quartet continued its efforts to help the parties to find a way back to direct negotiations. As agreed in Munich on 5 February, Quartet envoys have met separately with Palestinian and Israeli negotiators, and are giving serious consideration to the views of the parties on how to bring about resumed negotiations on all core issues, including borders and security. Quartet envoys will further engage with both sides, and the Quartet is planning to meet at the principals level in April. It is hoped that this meeting can help set the stage for renewed negotiations, and the United Nations is working actively towards this goal.

On 11 March, a shocking murder of five members, including three young children, of an Israeli family of seven took place at the settlement of Itamar in the occupied West Bank. The Secretary-General and the Quartet unequivocally condemned the murders, offered condolences and called for those responsible to be brought to justice and for all to act with restraint. The Quartet stated that attacks on any civilians are completely unacceptable in any circumstance. President Abbas condemned the murders and offered the help of Palestinian security forces in bringing the perpetrators to justice. We expect strong action against incitement or glorification of any violent acts.

Israeli forces were deployed in several areas throughout the West Bank with the goal of detaining the perpetrators and containing attempts by Israeli settlers to attack Palestinians and their property in reprisal for the killings. Despite those efforts, during the three days following the murders, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded eight incidents that resulted in injuries to Palestinians, and 23 that caused damage to property throughout the West Bank, as a result of settler violence. As well, the Israeli security forces reinstated the Hawwara check point near Nablus, which had been removed on 11 February.

Overall, settler violence considerably increased during the reporting period, with 60 incidents resulting in damage to property and 24 Palestinians injured by settlers in 18 incidents in the West Bank. In one of those incidents, on Monday, a Palestinian was stabbed and injured by settlers close to Hebron. In another incident yesterday two Palestinians were shot and wounded by settlers. We recall that the Israeli Government must fulfil its obligation to protect the Palestinian population in the occupied West Bank.

Citing security concerns, Israeli security forces conducted 320 search operations in the West Bank. One hundred and eleven Palestinians were injured by Israeli security forces and 217 were arrested. About half of those injuries occurred in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan during clashes between local residents and the Israeli police in the context of protests against settler activities in the neighbourhood.

We are also concerned by the increased violence and tensions in and around Gaza during the reporting period. Twelve missiles, one of which was a Grad rocket, and 55 mortars were shot indiscriminately towards Israeli civilian areas, including some 50 mortar shells, in an alarming escalation during the night between 19 and 20 March. We condemn those attacks, which are a violation of resolution 1860 (2009) and which must cease immediately. More than 20 air strikes and 15 incursions took place, resulting in the deaths of three Palestinian civilians and 28 injured, as well as two militants killed and five injured. All parties

must exercise restraint and respect international humanitarian law.

On 15 March, Israeli forces intercepted the ship *Victoria* 200 nautical miles from the Israeli coast. The ship carried some 25 tones of weapons and ammunition. The Israeli authorities believe that the arms were destined for militant groups in Gaza. If that destination were to be confirmed, it would constitute a violation of resolution 1860 (2009), which provides for the prevention of illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition.

We are deeply concerned about the decision of 12 March by the Israeli Government to approve the construction of approximately 400 housing units in the West Bank in reaction to the heinous murder in Itamar. On 1 March, the Jerusalem municipality issued a permit for the construction of 14 apartments for Israeli settlers in the Ras al-Amud neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. Those are provocative actions that only serve to exacerbate tensions. Once again, I would like to express the United Nations position that any settlement activity by Israel in occupied territory is illegal under international law and detrimental to efforts to resume negotiations and achieve the two-State solution.

Israeli authorities demolished 59 Palestinian structures throughout the West Bank during the reporting period. As a result, 119 people were forcibly displaced. Israel, as the occupying Power, is prohibited from destroying property belonging to individuals or communities, except when absolutely required by military necessity.

On 7 March, the Israeli Government announced its intention to demolish all illegal West Bank outposts built on private Palestinian land by the end of 2011. We welcome that announcement. However, we note that it fails to address the issue of the existence of more than 100 other West Bank outposts constructed not only in defiance of international law but also in violation of the Israeli Government's own regulations. On 28 February, the Israeli authorities demolished a number of structures in an outpost in the northern West Bank, prompting violent clashes with settlers that led to 17 arrests. Following the confrontation, militant settlers attacked a nearby Palestinian village, fire-bombing a house and injuring two children and damaging property. Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned their actions.

We stress the importance of further enabling steps by Israel to ensure greater progress on the ground in support of Palestinian State-building efforts. Measures agreed by Prime Minister Netanyahu and Quartet Representative Blair have started to be implemented in some areas. For example, on 3 March, the Israeli Ministry of Communications released the remaining bandwidth to the Wataniya mobile operator. Such facilitation is critical to further the development of the Palestinian private sector, which is the engine of sustainable economic growth.

However, State-building efforts by the Palestinian Authority will be at risk if the political process does not overcome the current impasse in the negotiations. It will be further undermined if tensions and violence on the ground continue. They also continue to be impeded in area C and East Jerusalem by Israeli measures that challenge movement and access, hinder the provision of basic services and undermine the development of resources.

As the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee is about to meet on 13 April, I wish to emphasize that continued support from donors is important to meet recurrent budget expenses of the Palestinian Authority. To date, commitments are far below what is needed.

The Secretary-General noted with much interest the readiness of President Abbas to visit Gaza in an effort to end Palestinian disunity. He also discussed the importance of Palestinian unity with the Egyptian Foreign Minister in Cairo and noted Egyptian intentions to focus anew on that important issue. It is important that the leaders respond to the clear wish of the people for unity. We welcome serious efforts by all factions to advance Palestinian unity and continue to hope for real progress within the framework of the Palestinian Authority and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

On 15 March, demonstrations involving several thousand participants were held in most major West Bank cities. On the same day, much larger demonstrations were held in Gaza, with participation estimated at 100,000. Protestors called for an end to the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian division. I report with concern that Hamas security forces clamped down on protesters in Gaza, reportedly injuring seven Palestinians. The following day they suppressed a gathering of students, resulting in tens of students injured. Also on 15 March, Hamas security

forces attacked local members of the press; on 19 March, they stormed the bureaus of Reuters, CNN and the NHK news channel, attacking journalists, confiscating tapes and destroying equipment. We condemn those attacks and urge full respect for the freedom of the press in Gaza as elsewhere.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, preparations for municipal elections are ongoing. The Palestinian Central Elections Committee organized voter registration in the West Bank from 9 to 15 March. It was unable to open its offices in Gaza due to the refusal of Hamas. On 8 March, President Abbas confirmed that the local elections scheduled for 9 July would be held on time. However, he reiterated that there would be no presidential and legislative elections unless they were held in the West Bank and Gaza simultaneously.

The situation of the civilian population in Gaza remains a concern. The weekly average number of truckloads entering the Strip during the reporting period was 882, compared to 566 in June 2010, before the announcement of the revised Israeli policy. However, the current imports represent approximately only one third of the June 2007 pre-blockade weekly average.

United Nations projects with a total value of $155.5 million have been approved thus far by the Government of Israel. It is now important to ensure the timely implementation of those projects and a steady flow of approvals. The recent movement of 23,650 tons of aggregate from Sufa crossing is a welcome step. However, a fundamental upgrade in the entry of materials through Israeli crossings is necessary for the United Nations to continue its work and, more importantly, for the rehabilitation of the private sector, which is critical to the revival of the economy in Gaza. Based on our estimates, the amount of construction materials that is now entering through the tunnels is substantially more than the amount passing through the Israeli crossings for approved international projects.

I regret to continue to report that Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit remains in Hamas captivity and has had no humanitarian access for nearly five years. We reiterate our call for his release and for humanitarian access to be provided to him without delay. We are concerned by the continued detention of several thousand Palestinians in Israel, and we call for their rights to be respected.

As far as the regional aspects of the peace process are concerned, there has been no progress in efforts to promote Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations. Settlement activities in the occupied Syrian Golan have also continued. We encourage the parties to pursue the resolution of the conflict in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative.

In Lebanon, Mr. Mikati, whom President Sleiman mandated on 25 January to form a new Government, has pursued his consultations with all political parties in a climate of increased political polarization. On 27 February, the 14 March coalition announced that it would not take part in the future Government. Mr. Mikati has placed great emphasis on forming a non-partisan Government. The Secretary-General renews his hope that the new Government will meet the aspirations of all Lebanese and calls on it to respect Lebanon's international obligations.

On 13 March, the 14 March coalition held a major political rally to commemorate the sixth anniversary of its formation. All speakers at the rally expressed strong support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and denounced the continued existence of arms outside the control of the State and their use as political instruments in the domestic arena.

I am concerned by the increase in verbal attacks and even some acts of violence in Lebanon against staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), following the death of a young boy on 8 March in Ein el-Hilweh camp. I call on Palestinian factions to de-escalate the situation. UNRWA continues to strive for the delivery of improved services to the Palestinian refugees it serves. I call upon the international community to step up support to UNRWA in order to urgently meet its funding requirements.

The overall situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has remained generally quiet and stable. Israeli air violations continued at high levels, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Further details will be discussed by the Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for Lebanon and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations when they brief the Council on the implementation of the resolution on 29 March.

Let me conclude by reiterating a sense of urgency to break the current impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The important achievements, especially

those related to the State-building agenda of the Palestinian Authority, will be at risk if the impasse in the political process is not overcome. A decisive effort must now be made by the international community and the Quartet to bring the parties back to negotiating the final status issues towards implementing the two-State solution. We urge the parties to demonstrate leadership and to rise to the challenge of making an historic peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.